

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE GROUP

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COUNTRY Egypt

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SUBJECT Deteriorating State of Coptic-Moslem Relations

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SUPPLEMENT

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1. The conflict between Moslems and Copts was recently accentuated when information reached the Foreign Affairs Ministry to the effect that a note has been sent to the UN Security Council by Coptic leaders, in an appeal to consider the fate of this Christian minority after the British will have evacuated Egypt. Accordingly, instructions were sent to Abd-al-Razak al-Sanhuri, who is representing Egypt at the Council, to ascertain the nature of this action.
2. Coptic grievances continue to emphasize the increasing difficulties encountered by the Coptic community in performance of their normal functions in their country of origin. The following adverse conditions are enumerated:
 - (a) The government is discouraging the employment of Copts in civil service. Since 1942 this trend has gradually grown to wider proportions, affecting the higher offices. In the Wafdist Cabinet, during the years 1942-43-44, there were always two Coptic Ministers. After Makram Ubayd's downfall, only one Copt remained. At present Salib Sami holds, like his predecessor, Saba Habashi, the comparatively unimportant post of Minister of Commerce.
 - (b) There are no longer Coptic Undersecretaries, Ambassadors or Ministers, Governors, Mudirs or Maamurs. There are fewer Copts in minor positions in other departments.
 - (c) The more important non-Egyptian commercial enterprises and the banks have been advised to employ Moslems only. No distinction is made between Egyptians and non-Egyptians.
 - (d) For new appointments in civil service the ratio of 1 to 18, which is the proportion of the Coptic-Moslem population in Egypt, is not maintained, in spite of the fact that 90 per cent of the Moslems are illiterate. The number of Copts trained to hold highly skilled jobs in many types of work is estimated to equal that of the available Moslems for corresponding positions. Yet discriminations are widespread. Of 15 engineers recently required by the Shell Company, most of the applicants were Copts, but only four were accepted, against 11 Moslems.

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- (c) The Copts resent the fact that the Egyptian Broadcasting Company regularly expounds the Koran each day, denying to them the privilege of interpreting the Bible, although the expenditure for maintaining this service is borne by both Copts and Moslems.
3. To remedy this situation a committee of Coptic leaders was created some time ago to defend the basic Coptic rights. Among these is the privilege to build churches without specific permission from the Ministry of the Interior. The Coptic Patriarch, Amba Yusab II, has in vain appealed to al-Azhar Sheikhs, to have this ruling abrogated. As a result, many applications for permission to erect Coptic churches have been ignored.
4. Although the British sanction appears strictly to be confined to moral support of the Copts, appeals by Coptic individuals who have been deprived of their rights by the Moslems continue to pour in at the British Embassy, indicating that the Copts have never ceased to regard the British as the ultimate champion of their cause. The critics of this implied Coptic-British alliance, the Ikhwan al-Muslimin in particular, charge that this British policy is calculated to precipitate a Coptic-Moslem rift, which will permit the British to intervene in Egyptian internal affairs.
5. The daily paper published by the Copts has proved an unreliable index of their true feelings, largely because of the opportunistic career of Salama Musa, the Coptic writer. At the end of 1944 and in 1945 Musa manifested considerable friendship for the Americans, suddenly espousing a pro-British outlook. Two months ago he lost the British support and is now publishing articles attacking the British and urging the repudiation of the projected Sidqi-Bevin treaty. Finally, Salama Musa, who has earned a reputation for being a leftist writer, has often advocated communist principles as the only sure method of emancipating the enslaved peoples.

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